

Marietta University Enhancement District

Livable Centers Initiative Study

DESIGN CHARRETTE SUMMARY

Southern Polytechnic State University – Student Center

January 15, 2013, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Overview

On January 15, 2013, Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU), in partnership with the City of Marietta and Life University (Life) hosted a Design Charrette, the second of four public meetings, for the MU2 LCI study.

The event brought together various voices of the public to gather input on the design needs, priorities, and overall vision for the area. The meeting was attended by just fewer than 100 people representing SPSU and Life, the City of Marietta, and the broader community.

- The two-hour meeting began with a warm welcome from the SPSU President, Dr. Lisa Rossbacher, and the Mayor of Marietta, Steve “Thunder” Tumlin, and City of Marietta’s Project Manager, Kyethea Clark.
- Next, the project consultant team, led by Jim Summerbell of Jacobs Engineering, gave a brief overview of the study objectives and Design Charrette goals.
- Attendees then joined two of four topic specific break-out sessions, each lasting 40 minutes, prior to reconvening for a recap from each of the four groups and adjourning at 6pm.

The following pages provide key highlights from each group. A full set of notes from each group is provided at the end of this summary.



Attendees arrive at Charrette, signing in prior to start of meeting.



SPSU President Dr. Rossbacher welcomes a packed house at SPSU student center.

The next study meeting will take place March 21, 2013 at the Marietta Center for Advanced Academics (MCAA) Cafeteria from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm.

Highlights from Break-Out Groups

Design discussions centered around four topic areas. Each topic was addressed by a unique break-out group and facilitated by a group of two facilitators as well as City of Marietta staff. There were two sessions for each break-out group. Attendees were invited to participate in two of the four groups during the meeting.

Connecting to Greater Marietta Community Green Group

- Focused on multi-modal transportation needs and critical connections to existing networks and activity centers – including bike and pedestrian facilities, transit and road improvements

Gateways & Entryways Blue Group

- Focused on current arrival points to the study area and where future gateways should be and look like – including an array of design characteristics, transportation needs, and other things.

Revitalizing Cobb Parkway (U.S. 41) Corridor Red Group

- Focused on how Cobb Parkway (U.S. 41) can be transformed in the future – including transportation needs, redevelopment preferences, and other design improvements.

University Center Purple Group

- Focused on creating a common public space in close proximity to the two campuses of Life and SPSU and design characteristics that would facilitate more of a live, work, play environment and better connectivity.

Each group was equipped with a sheet of design prototypes from benchmark districts as well as a series of maps to help facilitate location-specific discussion about the area's design needs. While each group focused on unique opportunities within the district, conversations largely overlapped, reflecting an emerging vision of the area and some consensus on the area's top needs/priorities as highlighted below.

Key Priorities/ Needs

- A landmark building or notable architectural element that creates a sense that one has arrived to a academic-based district
- A public space that is appealing to the broad community and provides a strategic connection between the two universities
- Greater connectivity among campuses
- More diverse destinations in the area
- Housing that is complementary rather than redundant than what is offered on campuses
- New and improved pedestrian facilities to U.S. 41, including better signage
- Cohesive design scheme that creates a pedestrian-friendly scale, building elements common to both universities
- Mixed use environment that facilitates combined trips and serves as a hub of activity

Connecting to Greater Marietta Community

Andrea Greco and Wade Carroll of Jacobs led the Connecting to Greater Marietta Community group. The following key questions were asked:

1. What are your main destinations off campus that you currently travel to?
2. If you would not use a bicycle or pedestrian route, what would be your main reason for not doing so?
3. Are there other destinations that you would use if there was good bicycle or pedestrian access?
4. What are the difficult roadway hotspots?
5. Would you take a shuttle or transit if provided? Where would you take it?

The majority of the discussion from both sessions of the group focused on increasing connectivity both within the study area and outside the area to top destinations. Discussions regarding specific modes of travel helped clarify unique needs for each mode of travel.

Group Highlights

- General Needs – There is a need for centralized green space and connectivity among the two campuses. Although Marietta Square has desirable destinations, there is limited connectivity to this area from the campuses. Most destination options lead you out of Marietta and not into it.
- Transit – Any shuttle service would need to run frequently – class schedules are an issue and it would need to be flexible. Transit needs to focus more on schools but also on the surrounding areas -. Would be good if all the Cobb Community Transit (CCT) lines ‘hubbed’ at the square so people could get there easily.
- Car Travel – A principal driving challenge is crossing U.S. 41 and making a left turn into the campuses and other left turns are also difficult. Travel at peak times is a challenge.
- Pedestrian Connectivity for Recreation and Transportation – Better and safer pedestrian connectivity is needed to U.S. 41 and the Marietta Transfer Station for CCT, within the SPSU campus, and along U.S. 41. Better signage would improve pedestrian experience. More recreational trails between the two campuses are desired.



Attendees consider ways to increase mobility in the area.

Gateways & Entryways

The Gateways & Entryways Group was facilitated by Megan Will and Amanda Hatton of Jacobs. Both group sessions asked participants to address the following key questions:

1. What do you consider to be the current points of arrival into the university district?
2. Where should gateway and entryway investments occur?
3. What design characteristics should these gateways and entryways exhibit?
4. What other areas in or outside the city create a sense of arrival; what do you like or dislike about those areas?



The Gateways & Entryways Group discusses the importance of university presence along U.S. 41.

The general feedback was that there's currently a limited sense that you have arrived somewhere unique. SPSU has a decent presence on S. Marietta Parkway and once you enter Barclay Circle, you know you have arrived at Life. While Fairground Street, Barclay Circle, and S. Marietta Parkway/U.S. 41 are major transitions to the area, there is no unique, overall sense of arrival to a university-centric district.

The two sessions discussed issues that constrain the character of the area and opportunities to create a sense of place and key entryways into the campus. Constraints included: visual clutter on U.S. 41, no strong signage on U.S. 41 for the universities, and no sense of arrival to a university district.

Creating new common spaces that both university bodies utilize is an important step for building a unique identity for the area. Two appropriate locations for these common spaces are (1) along U.S. 41, between the Universities' campuses, and (2) at the intersection of U.S. 41/S. Marietta Parkway.

Key Needs and Opportunities

- Wayfinding signs
- Consistent character, regulated through zoning regulations and design guidelines
- Collective entrance to both universities
- Improved streetscaping elements - new lighting, signage, and landscaping, focusing primarily on U.S. 41
- Unified architecture treatments
- Parking behind buildings
- Use of brick, stone and steel materials
- Appropriately scaled signage for context
- Incorporation of green infrastructure as redevelopment occurs
- Further promote pedestrian facilities and environment through regulations and public investments.

Revitalizing Cobb Parkway (U.S. 41) Corridor

Brett Wylie of Jacobs and Rick Padgett of Huntley Partners facilitated the Cobb Parkway (U.S. 41) Corridor Group. Key discussion points covered by both sessions of this group included:

- General needs of U.S. 41
- Desired land use mix
- Streetscape improvements
- Creating a pedestrian orientation
- Balancing efficient traffic movement and pedestrian orientation along U.S. 41

Due to the diverse nature of opportunities to revitalize U.S. 41, the overall discussion was broad and varied.

Group participants generally agreed that there is a need to strike a balance between facilitating thru-traffic movement on U.S. 41 and facilitating an environment that attracts desirable destinations that will draw people to the area. Improved visibility of both universities along the corridor is a priority.



Break-out group discussion regarding opportunities to revitalize U.S. 41.

Priorities for the Corridor

- A shuttle/trolley service that caters to students and is interlinked to area's other transit modes – Marietta trolley, proposed bus rapid transit (BRT), CCT, etc.
- Making U.S. 41 more pedestrian friendly – add medians, landscaping, improved and new sidewalks
- Give the corridor character by having common design materials for new development and redevelopment, common sign heights and unique signal design
- Promote mixed use development – retail below with housing above including housing that is complementary to what universities provide, has great exposure on corridor yet promotes a pedestrian-oriented center
- Future BRT station should be a signature use on the corridor
- Further consideration of whether a pedestrian bridge would be used. It must link to a destination.

University Center

Megan Holder and Jim Summerbell of Jacobs facilitated the University Center Break Group. Both sessions of the group were asked the same three questions:

1. What does not work now?
2. What would you like to see?
3. What are examples of University Centers that are done well?

Several items that were identified as not working well now:

- Lack of fluid relationship between U.S. 41 and Universities
- Poor campus visibility
- Unsafe and otherwise limited pedestrian facilities
- Lack of nearby job center, variety of housing options on and off campus, and mix of restaurants/retail in study area

Key Improvements Recommended

- Create connectivity between the campuses
- Public gathering spaces, including green space and aesthetically pleasing elements
- Mixed-use development that can accommodate a more diverse group of destinations - including cafes, complimentary housing, better shopping, and entertainment
- Additional transit resources



The University Center group brainstorms about potential improvements to the area.

Among others, participants cited Tech Square (Georgia Tech), Athens (UGA), and Massachusetts Ave. (Boston) as benchmark university centers to take best practices.

Example illustrations of design features that could be incorporated into the master plan for the area were provided to group members. Below are illustrations that participants preferred.



Privately developed student housing with community serving retail



Plaza and open space bring the university to the street



Repurposing existing commercial space for university classrooms, common space, cafeteria and offices

Additional illustrations that participants preferred.



University operated shuttle that connects both campuses to each other and nearby destinations



Open space links the private housing development to the public university.

Meeting Conclusion

The meeting ended with five minute presentations from the facilitators of each group highlighting the key group outcomes as summarized on the previous pages.

Brief concluding comments by Amanda Hatton of Jacobs and Kyethea Clark of the City of Marietta reminded community members to stay involved:

- All community members are invited to participate in an online study survey open from January 15 to February 15.
- The next public meeting is March 21 at the MCCA Cafeteria from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm.
- The study website www.mu2ci.com provides detailed study information, draft documents, meeting materials, and opportunities to publicly comment on the study process and contact the study team.



A wrap-up session at the end provided key highlights from each group. Rick Padgett highlights the discussion regarding U.S. 41.

Additional Feedback

The following additional feedback was provided via comment forms.

What public investments would best facilitate more of a live, work, play environment in the study area?

- Walkable communities and more entertainment in area.
- Realignment/ removal of Freys Gin Road on S. Marietta Parkway.
- Crossing S. Marietta Parkway is not walkable.
- Less separation of business and residential.
- Sidewalks radically change this area. Addition of pedestrian scale activities also changes the character.

What else would help improve the study area? Please provide additional comments and ideas here.

- Route Banberry Road southeast past Marietta Diner and remove Freys Gin Road/ White Ave.
- Build a pedestrian friendly connection between SPSU and businesses to north.
- [An] improved sense of place (and that includes the auto dealers).

Was this meeting what you expected? Please provide any specific thoughts on today's meeting format as well as any recommendations you may have for future study meetings.

- Yes. More information about session structure in advance would be useful.

Detailed Notes from Each Break-out Group

Connecting to the Greater Marietta Community

General

- Access to parks is problematic. People don't know they're there, can't get to them from campus or don't feel safe in them.
- Central greenspace is desired at SPSU or connecting with Life University.
- No existing connectivity to Life University from SPSU.
- There is some interaction between athletics on the two campuses but that's about it.
- Evenings and afternoons are busy class times at SPSU.
- There are a couple days a week when students spend the whole day on campus. Would be good to have other things to do when they're on campus.
- SPSU students live mostly off campus. Probably only 30% on campus residents
- Life University is probably 20% on campus at the most. They don't have much student housing
- Marietta Square has student friendly restaurants and businesses...however there is little connection marketing wise or transportation wise to the University.
- More outdoor dining destinations
- Campus folks might be willing to pay a nominal charge (say \$1) to leave their car and take transit into Marietta
- Parking is limited and not easy in Marietta. The parking garage is about \$5.
- There are some frequently visited destinations along U.S. 41 including the Marietta Diner and Baby Tommy's Taste of New York
- Further outside the study area, the Cobb Performing Arts Center is a destination.
- Most of the existing and planned transit and trails are north south towards Atlanta. There is little east west connectivity in Cobb County.
- Feels like all the options lead you out of Marietta and not into it.
- Need more agency cooperation (i.e. between Marietta and Cobb). Interagency cooperation seems to be a big sticking point as far as why things don't get done.
- Embry Riddle and St Leo University are in the commercial office park at the NE corner of S. Marietta Parkway and U.S. 41. Students here may feel especially isolated.
- University of Phoenix is leaving the area.
- People go downtown Marietta for entertainment: Marietta Square or Johnnie Mccrackens Celtic Pub.

Transit

- Student passes or discounts on CCT would be good
- Better access to the Square via transit
- If students work while in school, they usually have retail jobs. Could benefit from frequent transit service
- Transit within the 'hub area' in other cities is free.

- Existing transit is largely commuter based
- BRT is planned for U.S. 41. There would be a station near the universities along 41. Probably an underground or overhead crossing across U.S. 41.
- There is an existing privately run trolley service in Marietta. It caters to parties and tourists <http://www.mariettatrolley.com/index.html>
- There is an existing Trolley Thursday service goes downtown and to the Wal-Mart on Thursday evenings .It does not appear to get much ridership <http://marietta.patch.com/articles/southern-poly-teams-up-with-marietta-trolley>
- Any shuttle service would need to run frequently-class schedules are an issue and it would need to be flexible.
- Mentality of "if you have a car you won't ride a campus bus" or CCT.
- Fear based upon about getting robbed on CCT
- Transit needs to focus more than on schools but on the surrounding areas. Maybe CCT should come through the campus.
- Would be good if all the CCT lines 'hubbed' at the square so you knew you could get there.
- Connection opportunities between buses and trails
- Shuttle service to/near Roswell Road would be good. There are apartment complexes that students live in along Roswell Road across 75.
- Would support a weekend or periodic shuttle to Kennesaw or the Chattahoochee Parks

Car Travel

- Traffic level at peak times (lunch) is problematic
- Left turns from Campus onto South Cobb Drive are difficult
- Crossing U.S. 41 is problematic
- The main road through campus needs a more prominent feel
- Left turns are problematic from the industrial park.
- Support for the New Hope connector
- Might like a connection between bell street and if pine forest way went through to U.S. 41. Right now there is just a rear exit with the Marietta Diner

Pedestrian Connectivity for Recreation and Transportation

- Would be good to have a safe cut through for pedestrians or bikes to U.S. 41 to access the restaurants.
 - Better pedestrian connectivity across S. Marietta Parkway and needed to CCT Marietta Transfer Center
 - Bicycle travel along U.S. 41 is problematic due to the design of the road; recommend "complete street."
 - Better connectivity of pedestrian facilities needed on SPSU campus.
 - More and safer pedestrian connections needed along and across U.S. 41.
 - Safety for trails is an issue
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- Discontinuous sidewalks on campus are an impediment to getting around.
- Better linkages to both on and off campus restaurants. Hard to find the on campus dining locations.
- Better signage on campus for pedestrians/bikes would be good.
- Would like more recreational trail connections between the two campuses.
- Part of University segment phase 1 trail through the existing ball fields is about to be let for construction by the city of Marietta.
- Running club usually runs on campus. They run down....and hop a fence to get to the Life University Running track.

Gateways & Entryways

What locations do you consider to be the existing “arrival” points to the Marietta University District?

- Barclay Circle
 - Once you enter Barclay Circle, you feel as though you have arrived on the Life University campus.
- Fairground
- S. Marietta Parkway and U.S. 41
- Traffic on U.S. 41 inhibits a feeling of entryway into the community.
- On U.S. 41, there is no sense of arrival.
 - Waffle House is the arrival point to Life University on U.S. 41.
- Nowhere in the study area provides a sense of arrival.
- SPSU’s entryway at Technology Parkway is positive entry point in the area.

Issues that Constrain Character Area

- There is no sense of university presence on U.S. 41.
- There is limited university presence on S. Marietta Parkway.
- “Trash” on U.S. 41.
- The Life University sign on U.S. 41 is posted with signs for various other businesses. This detracts from the University’s sense of place in the area.
- CCT announces arrival at SPSU, but a similar announcement is not given when bus nears Life University.

Needs & Potential Strategy to Develop a Sense of Place

- Add wayfinding signs
 - Signage similar to what is located in Kennesaw near Kennesaw State University was recommended.
 - Atlanta University Center has collective branding for the universities in that area, something similar could be done in this area of Marietta.
 - Consistent character from the S. Loop to Barclay Circle on U.S. 41
 - Compatible zoning is needed on U.S. 41
 - Lighting
 - Landscaping
 - Creating connectivity between the two universities on U.S. 41 is important.
 - A collective entrance to both universities is needed.
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- Need to amend zoning and design regulations.
- Prioritize changes on U.S. 41.
- Redevelopment on S. Marietta Parkway will help but is a lower priority. It would be nice to be able to cross S. Marietta Parkway to pass desirable destinations on the opposite side of the street.

Potential Gateway Locations

- Just north of Life Way would be a logical location for a major entryway.
- Major signage is needed at intersection of U.S. 41 and S. Marietta Parkway.
 - This could be an iconic building and greenspace. Architectural details should be reflective of a university environment.
- A collective student area on U.S. 41 that joins the two campuses would provide a sense of arrival in the area.
 - The old hotel on U.S. 41 could become a joint university center. This could also serve as a gateway.
- Edges of universities (including planned expansion areas) are strategic locations for creating district entry points.

What Characteristics should Gateways/Entryways have?

- Unified architecture
 - The architecture building at SPSU is a good model building.
 - Tech Square in Midtown Atlanta/GA Tech does a good job pulling together various styles.
- Color schemes of both campuses (green) could be reflected in design elements
- New development at intersection of U.S. 41/120 will set the tone for the whole district – it is critical that this property redevelop with desired character!
- Incorporate sidewalks to facilitate pedestrian friendly area.
 - Provide a buffer between pedestrians and the U.S. 41.
 - Sidewalks also help create a more desirable visual presence.
- Incorporate green infrastructure as redevelopment occurs, and use these elements as an educational tool in the area.
- Require parking behind buildings on U.S. 41.
- Brick, stone, and steel materials should be encouraged.
- Bury or lower utility lines
- Need signage that is appropriate for pedestrians and scale of street.

Features of Campuses & City of Marietta to bring to study area corridors

- SPSU architecture building
- Something like Marietta Square to provide connection between universities – recreational and pedestrian friendly
- Streetscaping – brick sidewalks, wrought iron fencing
- Brick signage (such as that at Georgia Tech and Life University)
- Along U.S. 41, the turn lane should be extended onto two campuses

Other Connectivity Ideas and Recommendations

- Banberry Road could be extended through the diner parking lot on U.S. 41 to connect with S. Marietta Parkway, leading directly into the SPSU campus.
- Polytechnic Lane could connect to Life.
- Olympic Torch leading to the Braves Stadium near Downtown Atlanta is a good example of a strong entryway.

Revitalizing Cobb Parkway (U.S. 41) Corridor

Pedestrian Orientation

- Sidewalks – not enough crosswalks, lack pedestrian safety
- Students and others have to walk in road dangerous to cross!
- Use islands/ median to create safe crossing
- Is there a way to congregate uses in one key area(s) that draw pedestrians in concentrated area rather than “strung out” along corridor
- Look at traffic movement “turning into” businesses and not prohibiting customer access
- Little Five Points is a good model as walkable mode for business and people: food, retail, and village character
 - Maybe placed/located between universities

General Needs

- Strike a balance between thru-traffic along U.S. 41 and more destination-oriented modes
- Dobbins AFB – changes going on at base
 - What does this offer in way of challenges and opportunities?
 - Does this offer connectivity/access points?
- Improve visibility of both universities from/along U.S. 41
- Part of solution to providing desired aesthetic look/change is to use subtle (not so dramatic) interventions
 - May be easier to implement instead of one major change/ element

Desired Land Use Mix to Locate Along Corridor

- Grocery store – students now go to Wal-Mart for grocery needs; food
- Coffee/”Starbucks” – like Emory, geared to students
- Mixed-use, retail below with residential above
 - like Mercer-Macon (downtown)
 - Emory Pointe
- Look at Emory and GA Tech – examples of making bookstore & coffee shop in a more public setting;
 - Within a pedestrian oriented/parking reduced mixed-use environment
 - Great exposure on U.S. 41
- Develop strategy for evolving existing land uses to the desired future uses – similar to an “overlay district”
- If housing is added to corridor area, it should compliment and not compete with housing provided by the university.
- Add residential types to increase “roof tops”
- Students are asking for a variety of off campus housing beyond what is offered today.

S. Marietta Parkway between Aviation and Fairground

- Improve lighting, landscaping, and general overall look/appearance

High Volume Roads/Pedestrian Friendly Areas

- Mentioned several examples in southern California where there's a mix of high volume/ mix of cars and businesses up along a sidewalk
- Smyrna/Atlanta Road (City Hall area) is a good example of what can be done along a similar corridor as U.S. 41
- U.S. 41 is too wide! Too much asphalt!
 - Add medians, landscape, sidewalks
 - Common fencing/ materials to be used together to visually unify area
 - Create "parkway" character along U.S. 41 and S. Marietta Parkway
 - Add common heights and signals that are unique, announcing that you have arrived!

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Station - Could be signature use along corridor that could change area/ character

Trolley System for Students

- Specific bus line for students that can take you around area
 - SPSU bus currently only runs one time per week
- Kennesaw State has bus that runs to residential, campus, and surrounding uses
- Could Life and SPSU combine trolley system for more of a comprehensive system?
- A system that is catered to students and interlinked to area's other transit modes – Marietta trolley, proposed BRT, CCT, etc.

Streetscape

- Improve intersection visually at U.S. 41 and S. Marietta Parkway
- Add sidewalks
- Look at improvements to streetscape like downtown Marietta area and Suwanee
- Improved pedestrian-oriented character
- Lighting, signage, landscape, sidewalks
- "You know you have arrived"
- Clean up visual clutter – signs, lights, power lines and poles
 - Move overhead power lines to underground

Pedestrian Bridge

- Could be a gateway element
- Would this be used?
- Design could influence whether it gets used or not
- Where would bridge lead people to? It must be a destination!
- New transit station in area could provide funding and impetus (magnet) for bridge

University Center

What does not work now?

- U.S. 41 does not relate to the universities
- Poor campus visibility
- Poor retail, business + restaurant mix
- Lack of pedestrian accessibility
- Concerns for pedestrian safety
- Lack of campus housing
- Housing options and variety on and off campus
- Lack of connectivity between campuses
- Lack of community destinations or night life
- No walkability
- Lack of interaction between the campus and community
- Lack of mass transportation options
- U.S. 41 is a major road with too much traffic
- No landmark announcing that you are at a destination
- No job centers near the university

What would you like to see?

- Access into the universities from U.S. 41, possibly a shared entry way
- Traffic calming – better pedestrian access + safety
- Better shopping, unique stores, venues and restaurants
- Entertainment that draws people at night and on the weekends
- Pedestrian friendly environment
- Connectivity between the campuses
- Active green space that the universities could share
- Gathering spaces that people in the community and the university would use
- Complimentary housing
- Catalyst for other redevelopment
- Feature lighting
- Public Art
- Outwardly active public spaces
- S. Cobb entrance
- Streetscape on U.S. 41- parkway feel, trees in median
- Pedestrian bridge over U.S. 41
- Transit hub, should be unique
- Conference Center
- Multi-use space
- More cafes
- Cohesive architectural style
- Theme that reflects the campus
- Outdoor seating
- More aesthetic public space
- Brick walks and sidewalks
- Landmark building or architectural element

- Shuttle services or trolley
- More parking behind buildings and less fronting the street
- Focus on sustainability and LEED
- More density – needed to support desired uses

What are examples of University Centers that are done well?

- Georgia Tech / Tech Square – Atlanta, GA
- Church Street – Burlington, Vermont
- UGA - Athens, Georgia
- Mass. Avenue – Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Masdar City – how the technology and sustainability is integrated into the community

The group also worked with maps of the study area to define preferred geographic locations of proposed design features. The group focused on the area along U.S. 41 along the border of SPSU and Life Universities, seeing this as the most logical location for a shared university center, that would include all the features listed under the responses to Question 2, above.